

December 23, 2005

USAID/CAR Bi-weekly Report

Kazakhstan

USAID-Supported Accounting Program is Picking up Speed in Kazakhstan

The availability of trained accountants is essential for the country's conversion to international financial reporting standards, which are key to trade and investment growth in the region. This November, nearly 3,400 Kazakhstanis took exams in 13 cities across Kazakhstan as part of the Certified Accounting Practitioner (CAP) program. This is the largest number of examinees since the program's inception, despite a recent 15% increase in exam fees (to \$25) as the program seeks to achieve financial sustainability. The USAID Enterprise Development Project, implemented by Pragma Corporation, has been supporting the introduction of international-level accounting training and examination in Kazakhstan and the region since 2001. The USAID project developed training materials, helped build local training capacity, and is introducing the CAP courses into university curricula. Initially provided by the USAID project, CAP courses are currently offered by 34 local organizations in Kazakhstan; this is the largest number of local training providers in any single country within the former Soviet Union. Not including results of the November exam, Kazakhstan now has nearly 2,000 Certified Accounting Practitioners (out of 3,500 in Central Asia).



Nearly 3,400 Kazakhstanis took the CAP test, which has been administered in 13 cities.

Photo: EDP

A New Pilot Site for Safe Motherhood in Almaty

In December, USAID's health reform program ZdravPlus II initiated its sixth safe motherhood pilot site in Kazakhstan. The program, implemented by Abt Associates, works to improve the quality and efficiency of maternal and newborn care by introducing a more woman and family-centered approach in the country's maternity houses.



Safe motherhood includes immediate skin-to-skin contact with the newborn.

Photo: ZdravPlus II

The new pilot was opened at the maternity house of General Hospital #1 in Almaty City. To launch the pilot, 35 specialists from the maternity house received a two-week intensive training in safe motherhood and neonatal care that combined both theoretical knowledge and practical skills. The course was provided by a team of experienced international consultants, jointly with a group of gynecologists, midwives, and neonatologists from Karaganda Oblast, where the safe motherhood program was first piloted. As part of the training, the professionals from the new pilot attended a meeting with health leaders, gynecologists, and midwives from the USAID pilots in Karaganda Oblast and City. The participants shared their experiences on pilot implementation and discussed future actions to improve pre-natal care, care during labor, and post-partum and neonatal care. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Almaty City Health Department, National Mother and Child Health Center, World Health Organization, and the United Nations Population Fund.



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CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

Kyrgyzstan

USAID Trains New Kyrgyz Parliament

USAID's parliamentary development program, implemented by National Democratic Institute (NDI), provides critical technical assistance to the new parliamentarians sworn in last March, most of whom lack legislative experience. In early December, the USAID parliamentary program was kicked into full gear with almost a week of activities aimed at introducing Kyrgyzstan's new parliament members and their staffs to democratic principles of governance and law-making. On December 9, two visiting NDI experts facilitated a roundtable "How Democracies Deal with Political Crises," attended by 42 parliamentary staff members. The following weekend, nine parliamentarians and 42 staff participated in a seminar on government oversight, transparency, constituency service, ethical separation of powers, and constitutional reform. On December 12, twenty-three senior parliamentary staff of the Legal Department and the Center for Parliamentarism attended a USAID-provided training session on legal drafting, focused on the need for an open drafting process. NDI also plans to host a discussion on the ethical scandals in the Canadian Government and U.S. Congress and their lessons for emerging democracies.

USAID- Supported Incubator to Boost Small Business Development in Kyrgyzstan

The lack of financial resources, business know-how, and the costliness of adequate space are but some of the formidable obstacles to small business development in Kyrgyzstan. To assist entrepreneurs overcome these hurdles, USAID, through Eurasia Foundation, provided a grant to establish a business incubator in Tokmok City. The incubator was developed by the Congress of Women of the Kyrgyz Republic NGO, which also received financial support from other donors including the Department for International Development, the World Bank, and the German Embassy. The Tokmok City Administration donated the premises.



*President of the Congress of Women NGO Zamira Akbagysheva, U.S. Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, and Vice Mayor of Tokmok City Sergey Stupnikov open the Tokmok Business Incubator.
Photo: USAID*

The Tokmok Business Incubator was officially opened on December 1. It currently houses and supports six clients with a total of 19 employees. The incubator has already held a series of seminars on accessing credit that were attended by more than 200 entrepreneurs. Additionally, some 300 people received consultations on a range of business-related issues, and 15 small businesses received assistance with preparing business plans for funding, eight of which received loans totaling nearly \$90,000. The incubator's Internet Center provides entrepreneurs access to internet services and training.

Street Law Clinic Trains High School Students on Human Rights

More than 1,000 high school students at 37 schools in Osh attended lessons devoted to the 57th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights on December 1-9. The event was jointly organized by the USAID's grantee the Osh Street Law Clinic and a local NGO "Human Rights and Democracy Center." Seventy-four Street Law Clinic participants, law students from Osh State University, Kyrgyz-Uzbek University, and Osh Technological University, explained to high school students what human rights are, who bears responsibility to protect them, and why.

The USAID Legal Education Reform Project, implemented by ABA/CEELI, operates two Street Law Clinics in Kyrgyzstan: in Osh and Jalalabat. Launched in 2001, the clinics work to improve the professional skills of law students by involving them in the process of legal education at secondary schools, providing secondary school students a basic understanding of the law and human rights, thereby increasing their sensitivity to justice and facilitating their eventual active role in shaping the country's political future.



Bishkek City Council Holds its First Public Budget Hearing

The Bishkek City Council held its first public budget hearing on December 9, organized with support from the USAID Local Government and Decentralization Project, implemented by the Urban Institute. The hearing focused on the 2006 budget and was attended by more than 100 residents who actively participated in the budget discussion and raised questions to city officials. One retiree at the hearing stated, "We didn't know how difficult the process was before and now we understand that budget formulation is not easy work."



*More than 100 residents participated in the Bishkek City budget hearing.
Photo: Urban Institute*

The USAID project works with 25 pilot cities (58% of the country's total) on public hearings, asset management, strategic planning, budgeting, and citizen participation. Budget hearings allow city administrations to adjust their budget to account for citizen's comments and priorities. Additionally, such an inclusive process builds stronger relationships between the local government and NGOs. In total, 22 cities held hearings on their draft 2006 budgets, and the three cities that opted not to hold a hearing this year have held hearings in previous years. Bishkek was the last pilot city in Kyrgyzstan to hold a hearing.

Tajikistan

First Rural Loans Disbursed by USAID-Supported Microfinance Institution

The first seven of FINCA's clients in Rudaki district received rural loans in December in the total amount of \$2,130. With these disbursements, FINCA (which stands for the Foundation for International Communities Assistance) launched its new loan product dedicated to micro farm activities, estimated to benefit more than 2,000 clients in 2006. Clients can now receive micro loans up to \$470 to fund activities such as cattle and small animal breeding, or vegetable production. Agricultural activities represent around two-thirds of Tajikistan's labor force and one-fourth of the country's GDP.

USAID through its Central Asia Microfinance Alliance Project funded the opening of FINCA in Tajikistan in 2003 and continues to support its operations. FINCA offers both group loans and individual loans; most of the clients are traders. To date, FINCA has provided lending resources to over 1,468 micro-credit borrowers in Khatlon Oblast and Dushanbe City.

New Modern Pledge System Introduced to Tajik Financial Institutions

On December 13, the USAID Commercial Law Project sponsored a seminar to introduce financial institutions and other potential users to a new computerized pledge registry, developed by the Ministry of Justice. The new Tajik pledge registry will facilitate the implementation of the recently adopted pledge law, which defines the use of moveable property as collateral security for loans. The registry will hold public records of moveable property and will serve as a transparent and efficient means for creditors to establish a priority of interests and to determine who has interests in what collateral. The USAID project, implemented by European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, assisted in drafting the pledge law, helped prepare the technical regulations for operation of the pledge registry, and provides comprehensive support in its current pilot phase to facilitate registry launch in March 2006.

The new pledge registry will be piloted at more than 30 financial institutions: banks, micro-credit organizations, and other lenders. At the December 13 seminar, the USAID project presented managers and credit officers of those institutions with a detailed overview of how the Tajik pledge registry works. Additionally, each pilot institution received a unique registry ID for use during the three-month simulation period and a full collection of the necessary digital documents for simulated registration and searches in the registry.

